

Land Use Vision

In 2035 St. Croix County values its historic roots in farming and other natural resource based activities and desires to maintain its rural character or feel. We have achieved a rural feel by ensuring that there are ample amounts of open space between cities and/or villages, by encouraging commercial and industrial development to locate within or adjacent to cities and villages and limiting subdivision development outside of city and village limits. The open space is a mix of farming and natural resources including parks, trails, natural areas, river ways, hunting land, woods and wetlands. In addition, historic barns have been preserved and restored as part of the open views. The western side of the county has taken a different approach to open space and housing than the eastern side which has seen less pressure from development.

Introduction

Land use is a critical factor in managing the future growth of St. Croix County. Land use trends indicate what changes are occurring regarding type, location, and intensity of uses over time. It is these land use changes that should be managed in a manner that is beneficial to the residents and environment in St. Croix County.

Perhaps the most noticeable changes in St. Croix County over the past three decades were land use changes in and around cities and villages and the development of rural subdivisions. The rural land use changes were mostly from agricultural land to residential land, but also included some commercial and a few instances of industrial development. Regardless of its location in the County, the majority of the new development followed a different land use pattern than was prevalent over the last 100 years. The development since 1980 consisted of large lot rural subdivisions and larger urban lots creating lower density levels in both rural and urban areas. Proximity and connection to the interstate system around the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area provided new residents, who moved to St. Croix County to take advantage of reasonably-priced homesites, with quick, easy access to employment, shopping and recreation. As the residential numbers increased, commercial and industrial development activity expanded proportionately..

The growth and accompanying land use changes were greater in the western side of the county and along the I-94 corridor illustrating the influence of the Twin Cities and the transportation system. The growing population required new and expanded roads, municipal sewer and water systems, and new schools.

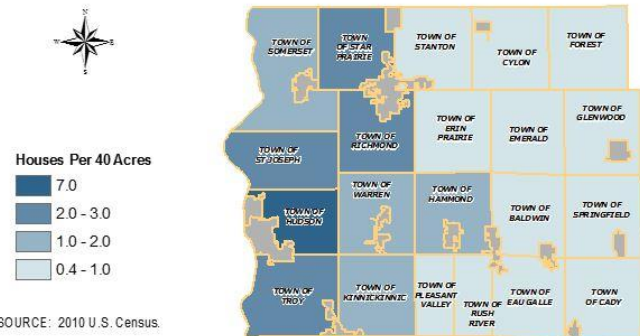
Conditions, Trends, and Issue Prioritization

Conditions & Trends

- Agriculture is the predominant land use at 253,000 acres.
- St. Croix County has experienced the highest percentage of population increase of any county in Wisconsin over the past 20 years.
- St. Croix County experienced a 128 percent increase in the number of housing units between 1980 and 2010. There were 14,924 units in 1980 and 33,983 units in 2010, an increase of 19,059 units.
- It is projected that by the year 2030 St. Croix County will contain 55,944 housing units, a 65% increase from 2010.
- The downturn in the economy has resulted in a large supply of vacant lots.
- Growth pressure has been greatest on the western side of the county because of the transportation infrastructure and the proximity to Twin Cities' employment.



Housing Units Per 40 Acres - 2010
St. Croix County Towns



SOURCE: 2010 U.S. Census.

Top Issues

- Land use issues and conflicts vary across the county; primarily from west to east.
- Changing land uses such as frac sand mining and commercial wind turbines.
- The continuing conversion of farmland to other uses.
- Cooperatively administer land use regulations between the county and towns.
- The construction of a new St. Croix River Crossing in conjunction with other highway expansions and improvements will expand the residential/commercial growth pressure on the Somerset/New Richmond area of the county.

Implications

- The supply of existing lots will affect the rate of new residential development and may slow the conversion of farmland.
- Farmland will continue to be converted to other uses but changes in farmland preservation programs may affect the rate and type of conversion.
- Residents may prefer smaller lots and denser subdivisions to fit changing lifestyles with greater access to services.
- The St. Croix River Crossing will require cooperation and coordinated planning to balance development and conservation in the northern half of the county.
- Land use policies and regulations will need to address the variations in development pressure and type across the county.

Special Subsections

Existing Land Uses and Land Use Trends

Land use data and trends for the County are discussed extensively in the Land Use Element Volume 2. This includes a discussion of land supply, demand, and prices in the County. The Agriculture and Natural Resources Volume 2 sections and maps identify and discuss the area's prime farmlands, floodplains, environmentally sensitive areas, and engineering constraints. Recent land use trends by acreage are summarized in the table below.

LAND USE TRENDS									
Land Use	1987 acreage	1997 acreage	2010 acreage	1987 parcels	2010 parcels	1987 avg. parcel size	2010 avg. parcel size	87-10 percent change	97-10 percent change
Residential	22,112	35,300	53,462	14,885	33,277	1.5	1.6	141.7	51.5
Commercial	2,273	3,529	5,548	1,332	2,322	1.7	2.4	144.1	57.2
Industrial	839	1,072	1,396	135	181	6.2	7.7	66.4	30.2
Agricultural	355,654	320,494	252,768	12,028	10,662	29.6	23.7	-28.9	-21.1

Source: Wisconsin Department of Revenue

The above table shows the consistent loss of farmland in the County over the past two plus decades. Commercial and industrial acreage have both increased, with commercial acreage increasing 144% between 1987 and 2010, and industrial increasing 66%. Residential land has also significantly increased since the 1980s. In 1987 the County had 22,000 acres of residential land. In 2010 this increased to over 53,000 acres. This increase equals over 50 square miles.

Parcel size has changed noticeably as well. Commercial and industrial parcel size both increased significantly. Residential parcel size increased slightly.

Opportunities for Redevelopment

As a County with numerous cities, villages, and hamlets, many sites in the County have opportunities for redevelopment. Following Plan policy, it is highly recommended that communities first develop in areas where redevelopment can occur. In most cases, these sites are serviced by public water and public sewer. In addition, these sites are often accessible via walking and biking and located in or near the downtown core of a community. There are limited opportunities for redevelopment in the rural areas. The County requires non-metallic mining sites to be reclaimed for agriculture, or other natural resources. In some cases the reclamation will open the site up for new land-uses and recreational development once mining activities cease.

Land Use Conflicts

Land-use compatibility and conflicts are an important issue in every community and county. The size of conflicts can be wide ranging. A conflict can be isolated and affect just two properties, it can be large with one property negatively impacting dozens of other properties, or it can fall somewhere in between.

One top issue underlying many conflicts throughout St. Croix County is the protection of water and other natural resources from the adverse impacts of all types of development and agricultural uses. In the rural areas of the County, localized conflicts exist between farming operations and residential growth. This incompatibility is more evident in the case of large agricultural operations and animal feedlot operations which some believe are more like industrial uses and are not compatible with nearby residential uses and other agricultural uses. They are also inconsistent with many communities' rural character.

There are other important land use conflicts in St. Croix County. Non-metallic mining operations are becoming significantly more prominent throughout west central Wisconsin, and this includes increasing pressures in St. Croix County. These operations can be controversial in that they can impact water and air quality. In addition, the associated noise and truck traffic impacts roads and other properties. Wind turbines are also a topic of discussion in St. Croix County. Parts of St. Croix County have adequate wind speeds to attract large wind turbines. Wind turbines often generate concern from adjacent property owners. Other issues include meat processing plants and intensive recreational uses like shooting ranges that can impact both adjacent properties and properties in the surrounding area.

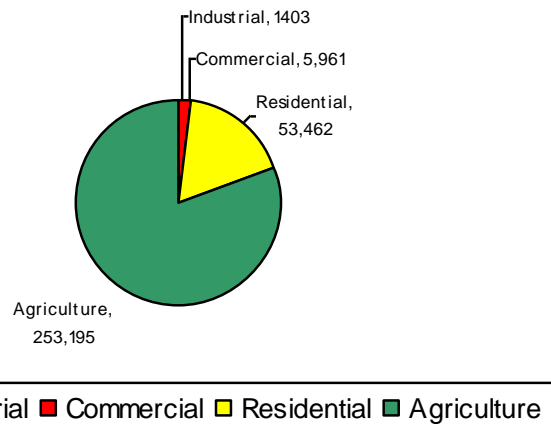
The County and local units of government need to plan for large-scale commercial and industrial uses, residential developments, and high intensity uses to avoid and reduce land use conflicts.

Land Use Projections

Land use projections are explored at length in the Land Use Element Volume 2. The diagram at right shows the composition of the land use acreages in the county as of 2010.

Land-use projections for the County are based upon population projections from the Wisconsin Department of Administration. For the purpose of this section, the Plan uses the 2003 Wisconsin Department of Administration population projections. Two alternative land use projections are provided based upon the population projection. The first scenario is Current Trends/Status Quo. This alternative assumes that development over the next twenty years will be of similar density and composition to development that occurred between 1990 and 2010 when development was less dense with larger lot sizes than the development that had occurred in the County prior to 1970.

Existing Land Use Acreage 2010

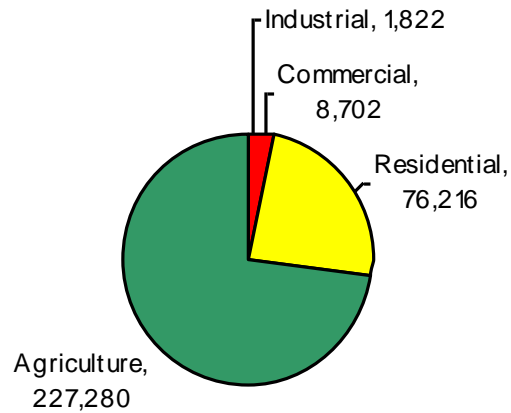


The second scenario, Plan Implementation, uses the average assessed lot size based on the average of all existing development in the County's cities, villages, and towns. This scenario includes both the pre-1970 development, the larger lot rural development of recent decades resulting in a denser and more compact result than the Current Trends scenario.

- Utilizing the estimated population projections, either land use projection will convert a minimum of 31 square miles of agricultural land.
- If the County continues to convert agricultural land at the recent Current Trends density and rate, approximately 40 square miles of agricultural land will be converted to other uses.
- Residential use is the greatest consumer of land; it is estimated that residential land use will grow between 27 and 36 square miles, or almost one township.
- Commercial land use will increase between 3 and 4 square miles or around 2,300 acres.
- Industrial use is projected to grow 419 to 454 acres, or less than one square mile.

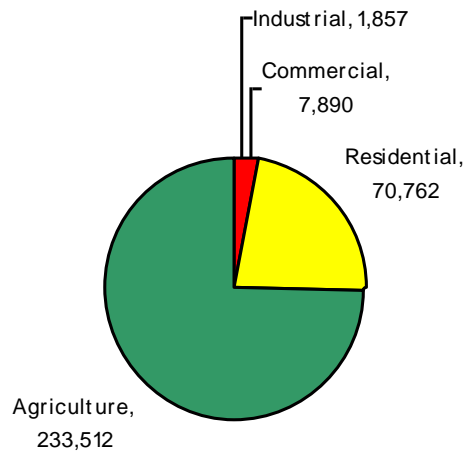
The pie charts below illustrate the difference between status quo development and more compact smaller lot development in the amount of land used.

Status Quo Projected Land Use 2035



■ Industrial ■ Commercial ■ Residential ■ Agriculture

Plan Implemented Projected Land Use 2035



■ Industrial ■ Commercial ■ Residential ■ Agriculture

Goals & Objectives

Goal 1: Protect the rural character of St. Croix County.

Objectives:

- 1.1 Provide adequate green space throughout the county and in individual developments.
- 1.2 Encourage conservation design developments to conserve natural resources and open spaces
- 1.3 Vary the density of development according to varying site conditions and availability of appropriate facilities and services.
- 1.4 Encourage compact development through expansion and infill of existing developed areas.
Encourage conservation design developments to conserve natural resources and open spaces.
- 1.5 Foster private land stewardship of individual properties and development by landowners, developers, and property managers.
- 1.6 Avoid visual pollution caused by poor design or management of buildings and structures.

***St. Croix County Comprehensive Planning
Public Opinion Survey Report Results, 2008:***

- 65 percent of residents would prefer that development use less rural land and be more compact around villages and cities.

Goal 2: Balance land use regulation and individual property rights with community interests.

Objectives:

- 2.1 Conduct all county planning activities with a fair and open process that provides opportunities for input from all county residents and property owners.
- 2.2 Develop land use regulations that have clear and equitable provisions designed to implement the public interest goals of this plan.
- 2.3 Administer land use regulations with a fair, open, consistent and equitable process that is open to all affected parties and respects the due process right of property owners.

Goal 3: Guide and manage development patterns that will preserve farmland and protect and enhance St. Croix County's natural resources.

Objectives:

- 3.1 Guide development to locations and conditions that minimize adverse impacts to natural resources.
- 3.2 Provide for a balance of land use types throughout the county.
- 3.3 Locate industrial and commercial development where suitable conditions exist and appropriate facilities and services are available.
- 3.4 Develop planning regulations and ordinances that address the diversity of community needs throughout the county.

***St. Croix County Comprehensive Planning
Public Opinion Survey Report Results,
2008:***

- 73 percent of residents said too much farmland is being converted to non farm uses.

- 3.5 Update and keep county ordinances current with revisions in state law, to address changing needs of residents and respond to concerns of local government.
- 3.6 Mitigate any potential negative impacts from the new St. Croix River Crossing on the natural, cultural, and historic resources in the St. Croix River Watershed
- 3.7 Cooperate with local communities along the 35/64 corridor to develop local area plans and regulations to address specific development concerns and issues resulting from the new St. Croix River crossing.

Policies

Rural Character

- 1.1. The county will encourage conservation site design subdivisions that retain at least 65 percent of the subdivision in permanent open space.
- 1.2. The county will use market incentives, such as density bonuses, to encourage conservation site design.
- 1.3. Conservation site design residential developments shall be designed to be compatible with the rural character and environmental features of the area
- 1.4. Residential clusters used in conservation site design shall be located in areas, to the greatest extent practical, visually screened from surrounding roadways and other residential clusters, so that existing open space vistas within and outside the site are maximized. These residential clusters shall be carefully adjusted to topographic and other natural and cultural features, taking full advantage of the setting of those features without causing undue disturbance.
- 1.5. The county will institute conservation site design standards through appropriate provisions in zoning, land division, sanitary and storm water management ordinances
- 1.6. The county will encourage the protection and expansion of outdoor recreation and off road trail opportunities.

***St. Croix County Comprehensive Planning
Public Opinion Survey Report Results, 2008:***

- 77 percent of residents preferred conservation design for rural residential development over traditional large lot rural development.

Trails & Property Values

Studies show that residential properties adjacent to trails have higher property values.

Land Use Regulations.

- 2.1. The county will update zoning ordinances to provide more zoning districts that meet the diverse needs of the county residents and landowners
- 2.2. The county will establish multiple agricultural zoning districts to accommodate a diversity of agricultural operations.
- 2.3. Cumulative changes to county zoning ordinances will result in a comprehensive revision during which towns can evaluate their zoning needs.
- 2.4. The county will establish incentives and regulations to encourage development in existing areas that are able to

***St. Croix County Comprehensive Planning
Public Opinion Survey Report Results, 2008:***

- 58 percent of residents support using public funds to purchase development rights.
- 70 percent of residents support private purchase and transfer of development rights.

accommodate new development, such as zoning, density bonus in areas other than farmland preservation areas, etc.

- 2.5. The county will consider a feasibility study to evaluate the creation of transfer of development rights (TDR) programs to encourage the preservation of open space and productive farmland.
- 2.6. The county will provide technical support and expertise, especially geographic analysis of social, economic and physical features, to encourage and facilitate the development of local plans.
- 2.7. The County will review its nonmetallic mining regulations to identify and implement updates needed to address changing industry practices and impacts.
- 2.8. The County will review its zoning regulations and implement changes to address large and small scale alternative energy development.
- 2.9. The County will be more proactive in evaluating current regulations in response to changing land uses.

Guide & Manage Development Patterns

- 3.1. The County will develop design standards that enhance the visual and functional quality of development.
- 3.2. All residential development should be buffered from nearby agricultural or non-metallic mineral extraction lands to minimize conflicts between farming or mining and residential uses.
- 3.3. Development in the county shall be consistent with the character of the surrounding neighborhood, countryside or terrain.
- 3.4. As part of the St. Croix County River Crossing mitigation, the county will update and identify protection strategies for environmental corridors and environmentally sensitive areas.
- 3.5. The County will utilize funding from the St. Croix River Crossing MOU to preserve green space through purchase of fee title, conservation easement, or transfer of development rights.

Future Land Use Plan Map

In accordance with State planning law this section summarizes the future land use plan for St. Croix County and contains information required under SS66.1001. The information is intended to provide a written explanation of the St. Croix County Future Land Use Map, which depicts the desired pattern of land use and establishes the County's vision and intent for the future through their descriptions and related objectives and policies. The Future Land Use Plan identifies areas of similar character, use, and density. These land use areas are not zoning districts, as they do not legally set regulatory criteria for land use.

The future land use plan is neither a prediction nor a guaranty. The County does not assume that all growth areas depicted on the Future Land Use Map will develop during the life time of this plan. Instead, the Future Land Use Map depicts those areas that are the most logical development areas based on the goals and policies of this Plan, local community plans, overall development trends, environmental constraints, proximity to existing development, and the ability to provide future services. In addition, when considering a specific proposed land use change it will be necessary to consult the local plans that applies.

Future Land Use Plans - Integration

All of the Towns and municipalities, except the Village of Wilson and the towns of Glenwood and Springfield, have completed their own comprehensive plans. In adopting a Countywide comprehensive plan, St. Croix County had to decide how to incorporate the future land use decisions of all of the local governments. The Future Land Use Plan is developed with both County and local responsibilities in mind. Provisions in areas of overlapping authority are general enough to provide flexibility, but specific enough to provide direction for County decision makers. For example, the St. Croix County Future Land Use Plan attempts to incorporate the future land use policies developed and approved by local communities. Because future land use classifications differ from one jurisdiction to another, the County plan and map utilizes a set of generalized future land use classifications to simplify local land use plans into a Countywide pattern. In an effort to integrate all of the town plans, future land uses were interpreted into the classifications used by St. Croix County. The classifications simply designate areas that share similar goals and objectives for future use, preservation, or development. While this Plan provides policies applicable for each future land use classification, local plans might have slight policy variations for the same classification. This means that the County Plan is not a “patchwork quilt,” and does not reflect without question every land use decision or recommendation made at the local level. Using this approach provides “checks and balances” needed for making critical land use decisions.

The County does not have zoning or subdivision authority within incorporated jurisdictions, so those areas have not been assigned a future land use designation in the St. Croix County Future Land Use Map. While this Plan includes goals, objectives, and policies aimed at influencing land use decisions in cities and villages within the County, specific future land use policies are not identified.

Future Land Use Classifications

The following pages provide descriptions of the future land use classifications as designated on the Future Land Use Map. These descriptions provide information on the purpose and intent of each future land use classification along with examples of the uses that can be expected within each classification. Additional land use classifications may be added as necessary in the future.

In addition to describing the general intent of each future land use classification, this Plan provides recommendations for the overall density of development. In most cases, this represents an average of the development densities preferred within Town plans, where such data is available. There may be some areas within a particular classification where existing development at slightly higher densities already occurs.

This Plan also provides policies relating to the St. Croix County Zoning Code that may be considered appropriate to implement the general intent and preferred land uses. Since future land use classifications are general, it is common for more than one zoning district to correspond to each land use classification. It is also possible that some zoning districts might be consistent with more than one future land use classification. Caution should be given as the list of appropriate zoning districts in each future land use classification does not guarantee that all permitted and conditional uses within a particular zoning district may be approved by the County or applicable Town. The County does not support rezoning or development of all the lands identified for development on the Future Land Use Map immediately following adoption of this Plan, nor do the Towns. Other factors will have to be considered, such as the quality of the proposed development, its potential effect on adjacent properties, the ability to provide services to the site, and the phasing of development.

Neither the Future Land Use Map, nor the policies within this Chapter, requires a landowner to change the current use or zoning of his or her land. While it can make sense to match portions of

the Future Land Use Map with the County Zoning Map immediately after plan adoption, other portions of the zoning map can achieve consistency with the land use plan incrementally over time.

It is the intent of the County, as part of implementing this plan, to complete a comprehensive revision of the zoning ordinances as stated in Land Use Policies 7, 8 and 9. The revision of the zoning ordinance will create multiple new zoning districts to fit and be consistent with the land use classifications described here.

Residential

Intent and Description: The primary intent of this classification is to identify areas suitable for future residential development. Residential areas include lands that are delineated as existing residential properties or vacant platted areas. In addition, some undeveloped land has been designated for Residential development where subdivision expansion is likely to occur. These additional areas tend to be adjacent to existing rural subdivisions or where local roads and utilities exist to efficiently and economically serve the area.

As mapped, this designation includes single-family residential development, existing farmland, scattered open lands, woodlots, agricultural-related uses, cottage industries, and mineral extraction operations. Areas included in Residential could potentially represent prime candidates for “receiving areas” under a countywide Transfer of Development Rights program, purchase of development rights, agricultural enterprise areas, or other land conservation programs.

The preferred housing unit density for this area is one unit per 2 or more acres; however local comprehensive plans may be more or less restrictive than this guideline. This land may be zoned Agriculture, Agriculture Residential, or Residential under current zoning regulations.

Mixed Rural Residential

Intent and Description: The primary intent of this classification is to identify areas suitable for future residential development. Mixed Rural Residential areas include lands that are delineated as existing residential properties or vacant platted areas. In addition, undeveloped land has been designated for residential development where subdivision expansion is likely to occur. These additional areas tend to be adjacent to existing rural subdivisions or where local roads and utilities exist to efficiently and economically serve the area. These additional areas are also delineated by local comprehensive plans.

As mapped, this designation includes existing farmland, scattered open lands, woodlots, agricultural-related uses, cottage industries, mineral extraction operations, and single-family residential development. Areas included in Mixed Rural Residential could potentially represent prime candidates for “receiving areas” under a countywide Transfer of Development Rights program, purchase of development rights, agricultural enterprise areas, or other land conservation programs.

The preferred housing unit density for this area is one unit per 2 or more acres; however local comprehensive plans may be more or less restrictive than this guideline. These lands may be zoned Agriculture, Agriculture Two, or Agriculture Residential under current zoning regulation.

Mixed Rural Agriculture

Intent and Description: The primary intent of these areas is to preserve productive agricultural lands, while allowing more residential development than is allowed in the Agriculture area, protect existing farm and forestry operations from encroachment by incompatible uses, promote further investments in farming, maintain farmer eligibility for incentive programs, and preserve wildlife habitat and open spaces, in other words, to preserve the rural character of these areas.

As mapped, this designation includes farmland, scattered open lands, woodlots, agricultural-related uses, cottage industries, mineral extraction operations, and limited low-density, single-family residential development subject to certain requirements. These developments shall be located in order to minimize the fragmentation of productive agricultural or forest land and to minimize any disruption to existing uses. Areas included in Mixed Rural Agriculture could potentially represent prime candidates for “sending areas” under a countywide Transfer of Development Rights program, purchase of development rights, agricultural enterprise areas, or other land conservation programs.

The preferred housing unit density for this area is one unit per 20 or more acres; however local comprehensive plans may be more or less restrictive than this guideline. The preferred density is based on the State’s Working Land Initiative density of one unit per 20 acres or greater for eligibility for the Farmland Preservation Program. These lands may be zoned Agriculture, Agriculture Two, or Agriculture Residential under current zoning regulation.

Agriculture

Intent and Description: The primary intent of these areas is to preserve productive agricultural lands, protect existing farm & forestry operations from encroachment by incompatible uses, promote further investments in farming, maintain farmer eligibility for incentive programs, and preserve wildlife habitat and open spaces, in other words, to preserve the rural character of these areas.

As mapped, this designation includes farmland, scattered open lands, woodlots, agricultural-related uses, cottage industries, mineral extraction operations, and limited low-density, single-family residential development subject to certain requirements. These developments shall be located in order to minimize the fragmentation of productive agricultural or forest land and to minimize any disruption to existing uses. Areas included in Agriculture could potentially represent prime candidates for “sending areas” under a countywide Transfer of Development Rights program, purchase of development rights, agricultural enterprise areas, or other land conservation programs.

The preferred housing unit density for this area is a combination of both one unit per 20 acres and one unit per 35 or 40 acres; local comprehensive plans provide direction on how to apply this guideline and where the differing densities should be evaluated. The preferred density is based on the State’s Working Land Initiative density of one unit per 20 acres or greater for eligibility for the Farmland Preservation Program. These lands may be zoned Agriculture, Agriculture Two, or Agriculture Residential under current zoning regulations.

Commercial

Intent and Description: The primary intent of this classification is to identify areas suitable for planned commercial development. There are some existing scattered commercial developments throughout the County and these areas are expected to stay in commercial use. Most towns delineated limited future commercial areas along major transportation corridors and intersections. The most appropriate commercial uses will be those that serve rural needs and/or are consistent with the existing agriculture and rural character.

Industrial and Future Industrial

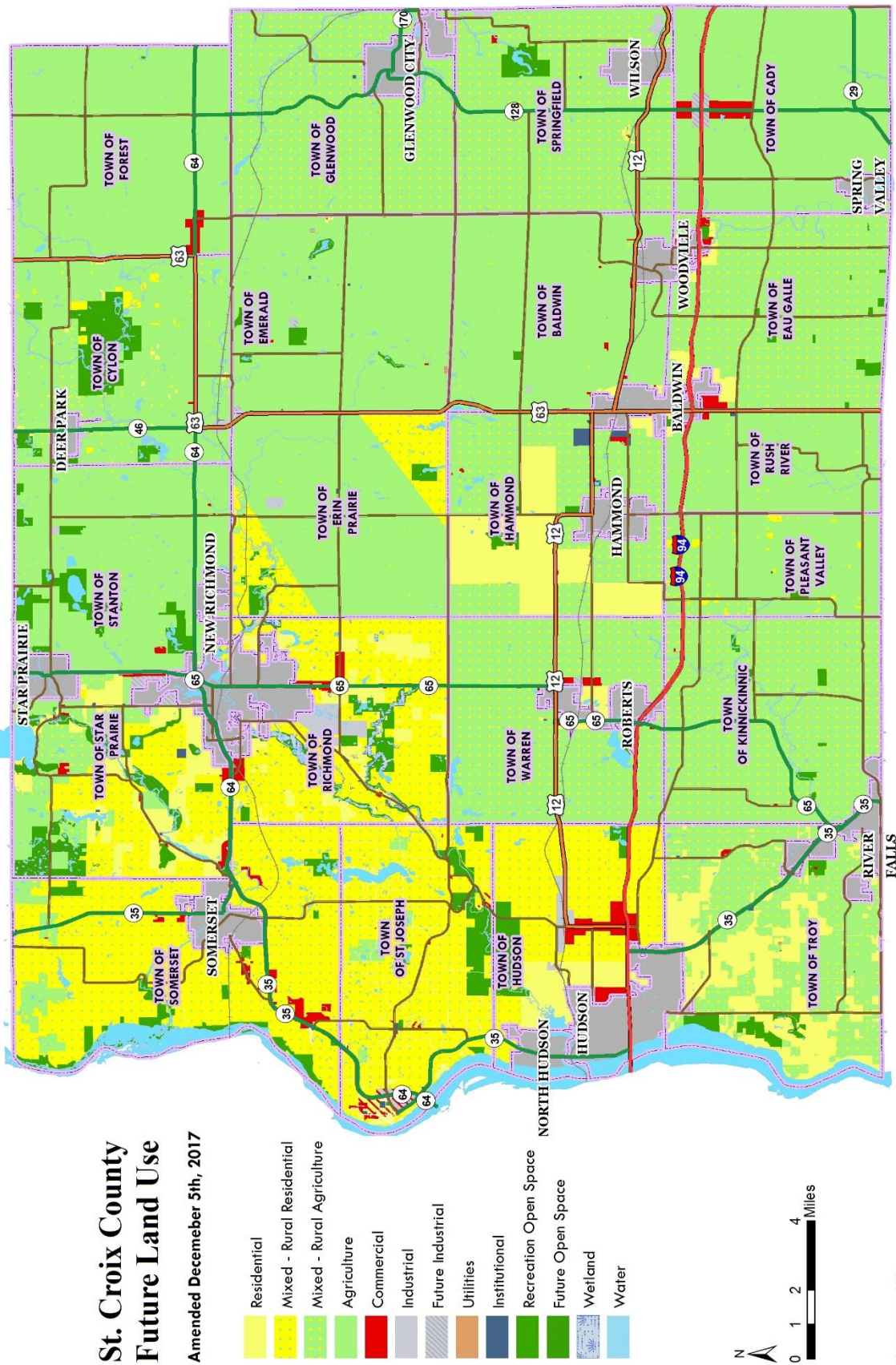
Intent and Description: The primary intent of this classification is to identify areas suitable for planned industrial development. There are some existing scattered industrial developments throughout the County (mainly quarry sites) and these areas are expected to stay in industrial use with some possible site expansion. Most towns delineated little to no new industrial sites and limited expansion of existing industrial sites. Appropriate industrial uses would need to be supportive and compatible with agriculture and the natural resources of the area.

Recreation Open Space/ Future Open Space

Intent and Description: The primary intent of this classification is to identify areas suitable for open space and passive outdoor recreation. The existing open space sites owned by the County, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, US Fish and Wildlife, National Park Service or Army Corp of Engineers are listed and mapped in the Natural Resources Element of this plan. Future Open Space was identified on individual town plans. These sites were along natural corridors and included shorelands, wetlands, floodplains, steep slopes and scenic areas. In most cases, the towns would not actively pursue acquisition but would encourage public or private ownership that maintained the areas in a natural state available to citizens as part of future development plans.

St. Croix County Future Land Use

Amended December 5th, 2017



Date: January 2018